

It is more different than you think: Art libraries in Germany and the UK

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Firstly, it is an honour to be asked to contribute to this anniversary issue. AKMB is celebrating 25 years as an organization supporting and representing art and museum librarians and libraries. ARLIS/UK & Ireland celebrated 50 years in 2019 and the *Art Libraries Journal* (ALJ) celebrated 40 years in 2016, so I have spent a lot of my seven years as editor of the ALJ reflecting on how far we have come. The past couple of generations have overseen tremendous achievements in the profession worldwide and these milestones are an opportunity to reflect on those changes and to look forward. This is a personal perspective and is intended to be (often) light-hearted, it also is limited to what I have observed within the limitations of having attained my education outside of Germany and of operating in a second language environment.

Pitfalls of the librarian jargon

So I start with language – all disciplines develop their own jargon and librarianship is no different. I wasn't prepared for how different library language in German is to English library-speak, and how librarians often use words in German very differently to the way those words are understood in the wider German-speaking world. I will give just a couple of examples that confused me when I first began as a volunteer in a museum library, shortly after moving to Germany.

I was helping out with cataloguing and used the term *katalogisieren* to describe my work. When non-librarians proof-read my CV, they did not correct my terminology. When a German librarian read it, it was changed to *erschließen*, which is the process of accessioning, cataloguing and making accessible. But accession is also *inventarisieren* and these accessions are recorded in an *Inventarbuch*. New acquisitions are not *Neuerschließungen*, they are *Neuerwerbungen*. And if you look up the word 'erschließen' in a good online dictionary, the translations show 'to open', 'to open up', 'to tap', 'to develop', 'to exploit'. So I was delighted when another library, in which I was also a volunteer, de-accessioned (*aussondern* or *tilgen*? I still do not know the difference) a lexicon of German and English library terminology! It has helped, but not with some of the more current vocabulary of our profession. It also has

not prepared me for the way that people have imported English words into the German language, but then use them differently. An example is a recent training event entitled 'Customer Centricity: mit Design Thinking Nutzer neu im Fokus' - a service can be customer-centric, but customer centricity (especially without a hyphen) is making an adjective into a noun and it just doesn't work (I looked up the term in English and it does appear to be marketing-speak, but when elaborated on, they resort to customer-centric because customer centricity doesn't really exist!). A more benign example is 'home office'. In English, we work from home, we might have a home office as a space in our home, and the Home Office is the British equivalent of the *Innenministerium*. We do not 'make home office'.

Structures and union catalogues

Germany has a national library – in Frankfurt-am-Main and Leipzig to reflect its once divided history. Neither the UK nor the USA have national libraries, per se. Both have libraries (British Library – BL – and the Library of Congress - LoC) that perform many of the functions of a national library, but neither do what the National Library of Canada, for example, does in maintaining a catalogue (a de facto national bibliography) into which libraries upload their records from or download into local systems. The BL is one of 6 legal deposit (*Pflichtexemplar*) libraries (along with National Libraries of Wales and Scotland, Oxford, Cambridge and Trinity College Dublin Universities), so they altogether do maintain a British national bibliography.

Germany has a federal, rather than centralized, political system. This, to some extent, reflects that it is a relatively new country, having amalgamated a number of kingdoms, dukedoms, etc., into states (*Länder*) at the end of the 19th century (a gross oversimplification, please forgive the foreigner). Each state has state libraries which acts as legal deposit library for publications produced in that state. Most state libraries belong to an association (*Verbund*) of libraries (SWB, GBV, KOBV), which have developed a co-operative catalogue, into which each library contributes its records or downloads existing records into their local systems. In recent years, these catalogues have

amalgamated with other association catalogues, to create a smaller number of systems that are no longer based solely on state boundaries.

In the UK, the closest we have to such a system is the JISC Discovery Hub <https://discover.libraryhub.jisc.ac.uk/about/>. The following description from their website demonstrates the point I make above, that the British Library is considered and not considered a national library for England. "In a single search you can discover the holdings of the UK's National Libraries (including the British Library), many university libraries, and specialist research libraries. This new service replaces Copac and SUNCAT, providing access to a growing range of library catalogues, with a new interface style and updated search facilities, with more changes in the pipeline." But this is a search interface, largely, and records are batch-contributed. It is not a contributory system that operates on the level of cataloguers uploading from or downloading records directly into their local systems. Although I do notice they have developed a shared cataloguing service for participants from JISC libraries.

You may wonder why I have spent so much time explaining a system that most of you understand better than I do. I have because it demonstrates a fundamental, philosophical difference in the development of the profession between these two nations: in Germany, it appears that the funding system facilitates a greater level of co-operation between different types of library and institution. Universities co-operate with independent research institutes, with art and music colleges, *Fachhochschulen* (which has no equivalent English translation that I have found, although the term polytechnic would probably have been used in the days before they all became universities), museum libraries, public and state libraries. I am sure I have omitted a category of library or two, but I think you get what I am saying.

In the UK, that is starting to happen, but in the almost 20 years I spent in London, we talked about co-operation, but there was little funding structure (until JISC came along) to facilitate it. Naturally technology plays a significant role in this facilitation. And the existence of the *Virtueller Katalog Kunstgeschichte (VKK)* – developed and hosted at the time by the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, as they are now known – is an example of how technology enabled the development of a searchable catalogue for art and art history. I learned of the VKK in the late 90s, while working in the library at Tate. We had, at that time, a lot of publication exchanges with German museums and the VKK was a godsend for catalogue information about German and Italian exhibitions. It helped in both the acquisitions and the cataloguing phases.

German libraries seemed so be advanced then to the outsider, but I think it has lost some ground in the past ten years, such is often the case with early adopters of technology solutions. Funding, of course, plays a part in that, as well.

Financial and human resources

Funding cannot be ignored and it is problematic in both countries. Libraries have faced financial challenges for all the years I have worked in them, so I suspect there has probably never really been a golden age of library funding. It affects everything – staffing, preservation, what you can afford to purchase – materials and space.

I have noticed there are far more one-person-libraries in Germany, in institutions where you would expect more staffing, such as art colleges. I worked at the Courtauld Institute of Art before I moved here. It is a specialist college with between 300 and 400 students (similar student numbers to where I work now). There were 6-8 full-time equivalent librarian positions, plus 2 library trainees and student shelving assistants. In my institution (and ours is not unusual), I am the only library-qualified member of staff and I work part-time. My colleague opens the library and works as both library assistant and as the secretary for the art history professors, in her less than 20 part-time hours per week. We are only permitted to hire student help for special projects. I have met many research institute and museum librarians in Germany who are also solo librarians. This has an impact on library users because the library must close when solo librarians are on vacation, are sick, or are participating in training events or conferences (which are vital to their current professional awareness, continuing professional and service development). It is not always evident that employers value the ongoing training of their staff, which is even more important for the solo librarian, possibly isolated from new developments and alternative solutions to problems in their library. But there are other impacts, most of which are impossible because there are not enough hours in the work-day, such as providing an inter-library loan service or processing large bequests.

Journals

It is not uncommon for art and museum libraries to buy their journals directly from the publisher or through a bookshop. I have never experienced that before except, perhaps, for small run, artist-produced zines or magazines. This can be so time-consuming, chasing undelivered issues, etc. In the UK, I suspect most, if not all, libraries use subscription agents. However, this direct purchase has some benefits. It helps keep inde-

pendent bookshops operating, it removes some of the bureaucracy, and, for a library with only a few subscriptions, a subscription agent can seem like overkill.

Many art journals, like *Spike* and *Procollum*, published in the German-speaking world have decided to publish in English. This makes them more accessible to the wider world, but our students, unsurprisingly, prefer material written in German. We are back to language, but we cannot pretend that everyone can read about art, theory, philosophy comfortably in English, as opposed to their native language. It may restrict the options outside Germany for talented artists and academics because they lack fluency and confidence in English.

The *Zeitschriftendatenbank (ZDB)* – German union catalogue of serials and monographic series – allows libraries to list their holdings of journal titles centrally. These titles may or may not also appear in their local systems. The UK formerly had *SUNCAT*, which has been subsumed into the *JISC Discovery Hub*.

Through the *ZDB* researchers can find who holds a title, but not the contents of issues. Therefore many libraries catalogue articles into their local and co-operative catalogues so the content can be discovered. Many libraries do not subscribe to journal indexing databases (*Art Full Text*, *Art & Architecture Source*, *Art Bibliographies Modern*, *JSTOR*, etc). This is not common practice in UK libraries. Most subscribe via service providers, such as *EBSCO* and *Proquest*, as do larger academic and state libraries in Germany. These are too expensive for small institutions and the expense is hard to justify when the indexing is in English and the journals indexed are disproportionately English titles. The digital divide between large and small, academic and museum libraries is starker here and reminds me of the situation in the UK 15 to 20 years ago.

Cataloguing issues

Cataloguing articles from journals and chapters from books is labour-intensive. UK libraries rarely do this and I do not know how well the majority of library systems would cope with this practice. The library system (*aDIS*) I use communicates well with the *Verbund Catalogue K10plus*, which supports cataloguing of articles and chapters. This reveals, I think, another fundamental difference between the communities. Cataloguers in the UK often struggle to assert the importance of full cataloguing to their institutions and compromises are sometimes forced on them. One such compromise is with series parent and child cataloguing relationships. It is something I never learned properly and I am

not even sure I can explain what I mean with any confidence because it just wasn't necessary in routine cataloguing. Series titles were added entries, rather than being a whole separate record that was then connected to each successive title in the series that was published.

Perhaps English-language publishing does not produce as many series, while we know that German academic publishing loves series. There are even series with sub-series and these parent – child relationships can be difficult to articulate and take a tremendous amount of cataloguers' time to create. It is often the case in *K10plus* that series have been created when they are not actually there. I have seen this with museum and gallery exhibition catalogues. Some cataloguers have treated each exhibition catalogue as an entity unto itself (which is the usual practice in UK libraries). Others have artificially created a series record for all the publications of a museum, and then connect each new publication to that series record. It means that when searching for a record to import when there is no ISBN number, it is important to search for title/artist, but also to search under the museum or gallery's name. This is also time-consuming and a lot of duplicate records then have to be reconciled in data-cleaning exercises. At some point in the UK pragmatism won out over completeness. Given the extra work required to link records and then un-link duplicates, I can see the advantages of the compromise, as long as the titles can still be located.

Things in common and perspectives

This has been an overview of some of the differences I have experienced having worked in libraries in both the UK and Germany. It is important to highlight some of the similarities, because there is more that binds us together than separates us. The first commonality is that librarians in art and museum libraries in both countries are passionate about what they do.

They are well-organized, with a professional structure within their associations like *AKMB* and *ARLIS* and support one another through their professional networks, even though it can be difficult to get institutional support to attend events like *ARLIS* and *IFLA* conferences or workshops and *Bibliothekartag*.

Some of the trends in the wider library community, such as digitization, are being facilitated through greater collaboration between the library, archives and museums sectors in both countries. This, I think, is enabled by widespread adoption of the *RDA* cataloguing framework. It is a sometimes painful transition, but a common cataloguing standard should improve visibility and efficiency over time. *RDA* has some similari-

ties to MARC Format and AACR II rules, whereas the rules can be quite different to the *Regeln für die alphabetische Katalogisierung* (RAK). It was a brave move for the German-speaking countries to translate and implement RDA across the sector but that also should help us with inter-operability within Germany, Austria and Switzerland, as well as the wider library world. The GND4C project for authority records across the library, archives and museums sector is another exciting project. If successful, it should provide a way forward for similar synthesis in other countries.

As for the future I would hope there continues to be co-operation and communication between the German and UK art libraries worlds and that it might actually accelerate. I think our journals have a role to play in this exchange. It would be wonderful to have more articles from both sides shared and translated. It is a challenge for all of us, given how time pressed we all are, but it is necessary for the profession to develop to serve 21st century users.

